

CONTRIBUTION OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM FOR ACHIEVING COMPETITIVENESS OF CROATIAN COASTAL DESTINATIONS

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Abstract

Purpose – Gastronomy represents an important part of a destination's tourist product. Today tourists are searching for new gastronomic experiences and are willing to travel due to them. In order to achieve their potential in developing a competitive gastronomic tourist offer, destinations must focus on offering traditional dishes that reflect the very essence of destination's tradition that will attract them to pick that destination for their visit. The paper presents the current state of Croatian gastronomic tourist offer in coastal destinations, and proposed necessary acts for further improvement of this specific tourist offer.

Methodology – research is based on a thorough analysis of scientific and professional literature in gastronomic tourism, and secondary data. The results of TOMAS Summer 2017-attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia were used to present the most recently determined attitudes of tourists towards Croatian gastronomic offer.

Findings – the results indicate that gastronomy was a motive of visit for 29 percent of visitors, and the majority prefer restaurants and experiencing gastronomic offer. In terms of satisfaction, the results are unsatisfactory in relation to its potential (average grade for overall richness of gastronomic offer in a destination, quality of food in restaurants outside the accommodation establishments). Quality of food in the accommodation establishments and overall value for money were graded as high.

Originality of research – The paper contributes in understanding the importance of developing Gastronomic tourist offer and its contribution to the competitiveness of a coastal destination's tourist offer. Based on the findings the authors proposed developmental guidelines aimed towards its further improvement.

Keywords Gastronomy, Gastronomic Tourism, Croatia, Coastal Destinations, Competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

World expansion of travels to the destinations which possess standard tourist offer has reached its top limit. Positioning of tourist offer and its products based on the economy, as well as quality and specific features of a destination as differentiating factor enables multiplication of socioeconomic use from tourism and contributes towards progression of additional value along with the sustainable valorisation of tourist resource basis. Over the years globalization trends had an exceptional impact on changes of today's contemporary tourism trends, as well as on the appearance and understanding of tourism in total, and the appearance of "new" tourists. People who choose to participate in today's tourism flows show a much higher level of experience than ever before, and have higher expectations, not only while staying in a destination, but during their travel to the destination. In order to be able to satisfy their growing and changing needs,

additional elements need to be introduced within the current tourist offer, and achieved destination's excellence needs to be measured by expectations and experiences, respectively achieved experience. Precisely such diversification of needs and motives due to which potential tourists choose to visit and stay in a certain destination brings to the qualitative departure from the outdated standard tourist offer (Vitasović, 2014, 116-118). The development of tourism today is paradoxical. It simultaneously generates processes of globalization and enhanced appreciation of local resources. Tourism destinations obliged to maintain increasingly intense competitiveness and engaged in a constant struggle to retain some of their market, face an increasingly dynamic and sophisticated environment. The world is increasingly open; however, tourists seek experiences based on local identity and culture. In recent years, gastronomy has become an indispensable element in order to get to know the culture and lifestyle of a territory. Gastronomy embodies all the traditional values associated with the new trends in tourism; respect for culture and tradition, a healthy lifestyle, authenticity, sustainability, experience... (UNWTO, 2012, 10). According to the report *Tourism and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Concepts and Definitions* (UNWTO, 2012), Gastronomy and culinary practices are considered as a part of intangible cultural heritage of a tourist destination, which is not surprising considering that the gastronomic offer mainly consists of dishes which are authentic for certain destination. This category includes all foods and beverages of particular importance for cultural groups, or a certain tourist destination. Gastronomic heritage such as wine and gastronomic routes, etc. has become an incredibly popular category for tourists, which enables easier recognisability of a destination on a tourist map, and its rural development. Food festivals have gained on importance over the years and have a high importance for gastronomic tourism development on a destination level considering that they mostly contain various forms of cooking workshops, collection of processing of forest fruits and medicinal herbs, etc., which enables unique experience for event attendants. They need to be managed by a team of professionals, in order its full potential and effect, respectively event's sustainability and high level of quality on a long-term basis.

In Croatia cuisine has always been an important part of its identity and cultural heritage, especially when taken into consideration that culinary identity is one of the most important factors in promotion of a destination's tourist offer (———, 2014). This uniqueness has been recognized on world level, and numerous tourists are not choosing Croatia as a holiday destination exclusively for bathing and relaxation as in the majority of cases, but also for experiencing its autochthonous gastronomic tourist offer. The majority of tourist turnover in Croatia is achieved in the summer period, however, with proper managing of development and marketing activities, Croatia could take an important position within the gastronomic tourism flows on world level during the whole year, which could significantly reduce the seasonal character of its business.

The purpose of the paper is provide the insight how gastronomic tourist offer contributes towards achieving higher level of competitiveness of a tourist destination, while the goal of the paper is to present the state of gastronomic offer of Croatia in which the emphasis will be on coastal destinations in which the majority of tourist turnover is achieved, and how its further development can contribute towards higher level of competitiveness on world level.

In order to achieve the purpose and the goal of the paper, the authors will determine the profile of tourists who choose to spend their holiday in coastal destinations of Croatia (gastronomic offer as a motive for a visit, activities preferred and the level of satisfaction with the gastronomic offer).

The research should result in response to the following question:

1. To which extent is gastronomy the motive of visit for tourists who choose Croatian coastal destinations as their holiday destinations?
2. Which activities do tourists prefer during their visit when gastronomy is involved?
3. To which extent are tourists who visit coastal Croatia for their holiday satisfied with the gastronomic offer?

Besides stated, the authors will try to, by responding on stated research questions, to contribute to stronger positioning of Republic of Croatia on the tourist market as a destination of rich gastronomic heritage which will strongly influence on its competitive position on the tourist market as well as increasing the total satisfaction of tourists during their stay in Croatian coastal destinations.

1. GASTRONOMIC TOURISM AS A PART OF CONTEMPORARY TOURIST OFFER-A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Trying to define the term Gastronomy is not an easy task, which was proven by numerous researchers and authors who tried to do this, but failed in a way considering that sometimes definitions provided can significantly be hard to apply in practice. An easy and simple explanation of the term is closely concerned with the enjoyment of food and beverages, which is everybody's subject of interest during their stay in a destination (Ivanović et. al, 2010). According to Zadel et al. (2014), Gastronomic tourism represents a specific form of tourism that is closely connected to the wine tourism. Successful development of this specific form of tourism brings numerous benefits such as preservation of authentic dishes and traditional way of diet, as well as development of the entire tourist product. All this is consistent with the fact this specific form of tourism has been recognized worldwide. UNWTO (2019a, 44; 2019b, 8) defines Gastronomy tourism as a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. Along with authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences, Gastronomy Tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes. Gheorghe et al. (2014, 13, according to Lee et al., 2015) define gastronomic tourism as undertaking a journey and visiting regions that are rich with gastronomic resources which generate recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes. This includes visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomical festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings or any activity related to food. According to the Global Report on Food Tourism (UNWTO, 2012, 6), today more and more tourists in the world are looking for concrete learning experiences, and in this endeavour, the gastronomic experience, in highly diverse ways is playing an increasingly prominent part. Gastronomic tourism is an emerging phenomenon that is being developed as a new tourism product due, inter alia, to the fact that according to the specialized

literature over a third of tourist spending is devoted to food. Therefore, the cuisine of the destination is an aspect of utmost importance in the quality of the holiday experience. All this resulted with the fact that Gastronomic tourism has been a topic of numerous scientific and professional researches for many years now, and has been researched from any aspects. Bukharov and Berezka (2018) analysed in their paper the importance of tourist gastronomy experiences as well as how local gastronomy can contribute for a tourist destination to achieve a greater level of attractiveness and competitiveness on the tourist market. They formed a conceptual framework which is based on the results of the analysis of good practices in Russia when developing a gastronomic value proposition for tourists. The determined results indicate that gastronomy is very important for tourists and positively contributes in achieving destination's greater level of attractiveness on the tourism market which is of significant importance for current tourists for which it can be expected that they will revisit in the future, as well as for attracting new tourists. Recommendations that were proposed support strongly the formation of gastronomy value proposition which is based on gastronomic heritage of a specific region as well as specificities of local food products.

In their research Leko Šimić and Pap (2016) pointed out on the importance of determining the perceptions of both food supply actors and foreign tourists in order to determine which are the strengths that need to be used, and which weaknesses need to be reduced or completely removed in order to achieve further improvement of food offer for tourists in order to increase their level of satisfaction, which would result in a higher level of competitiveness. Their findings indicate that the most important strengths are the level of quality and originality, while the weaknesses manifest in high prices and inadequate marketing activities respectively timely and accurate provision of information about the offer, due to which tourists are very often unaware of the possibilities they can experience during their stay in a destination. Pérez Gálvez et. al (2017) focused in their paper on gastronomy as an element of attraction in a tourist destination, and the main focus was the one of the biggest Peruvian cities, Lima. Their goal was to determine socioeconomic characteristics of foreign tourists, their motivations towards gastronomic offer, as well as the level of satisfaction. The authors managed to prove that new food experience as well as socialization contribute to a greater extent to tourist's gastronomic satisfaction. The results pointed out on the necessity of financing further development with a goal of achieving further competitiveness of a tourist destination.

Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen's findings (2016) indicate the importance of understanding the strong connection between food and tourism, respectively that food can influence the decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination and the satisfaction. Also they determined that the structure of traveller's experiences related to food consists of three dimensions: what is served, the restaurant's environment, and food related behaviour, and finally that food experiences also include a dynamic aspect that prolongs tourist's experiences.

One of the elements of a contemporary tourist product that has gained on importance and became an essential part of a promotion of destination's culture and tradition are various forms of events (cultural ones in particular), and destination management is

paying particular attention towards their organization, especially since they result in numerous socioeconomic benefits for tourists, and a destination in total. If properly formed and organized, they can contribute significantly in formation of a recognizable positioning, as well as competitive positioning on the tourist market (Drpić et. al., 2014; Drpić et al., 2017). In order to be able to organize them properly with a primary goal of satisfying tourist's preferences and long-term benefits, and stimulate them to revisit, particular attention needs to be given to determining tourist's behaviour and level of satisfaction (Marković et. al., 2015; Folgado-Fernández, 2017; López-Guzmán et. al., 2017; Corinto, 2017; de Jong & Varley, 2018). Over the years, Croatian cuisine has been recognized on world level and promoted in the media due to its uniqueness and diversity, and as a result it has become one of the triggers in the decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. Tourists wish to explore unique and diverse tastes characteristic for Croatia choose it for their holiday.. In the following chapter the authors will present the characteristics of cuisine of coastal Croatia, as well as the current state of its tourist offer.

2. PRESENTATION OF CHARACTERISTICS AND THE STATE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM OFFER OF COASTAL CROATIA

According to the Strategy of Development of Croatian Tourism until 2020 (author's adaptation according to 2013, 9), Gastronomy represents a complex product consumed by almost all tourists, although a relatively small number of international tourists travels exclusively due to gastronomic experiences, so the growth of demand is generated mostly by the domestic population. Available researches indicate that approximately 63% of tourists consume local food products. Despite the fact that gastronomy as a part of a tourist product has been developed mostly on the Istrian area, and then in Dalmatia and other regions, systematic approach of this part of tourist offer is insufficiently valorised, despite the fact that it has been an integral part of tourist promotion of Croatia for many years now. Croatian tourism is still strongly influenced by the seasonality, and the majority of tourist turnover is achieved in the summer period in the coastal destinations in which tourists are able to experience unique and unforgettable tastes. The following table presents the main characteristics of cuisine of Coastal Croatia.

Table 1: Characteristics of Croatian cuisine of Coastal destinations

Region	Characteristics	Dishes
Istria and Kvarner	<p>Influence of Romans, Germans, and Slavic ancestors from Middle Europe.</p> <p>Cuisine mostly based on fish and seafood, meat, local aromatic herbs and spice herbs, vegetables, grains, good quality olive oils, etc.</p>	<p><i>Cold Appetizers:</i> fish pates, salted sardines, Grobnik cheese, Istrian Smoked Ham, Truffle cheese, Cod spread, snails...</p> <p><i>Hot appetizers:</i> various forms of risotto and pasta with seafood, various forms of Minestrone so called "Maneštra", Ravioli with asparagus, Fuži with truffles, Royal pljukanci, Clam risotto, etc.</p> <p><i>Main dishes:</i> Lamb under "peka", smoked pork and sausages with sour cabbage, traditional pasta such as Fuži, Pljukanci, Gnocchi with goulash, Cod in a tomato and onion sauce, Lamb Istrian Style, Stewed Rabbit, etc.</p> <p><i>Desserts:</i> Pinca, Kroštule, Fritule, Cakes with chestnuts, Cakes with raisins, etc.</p>
Dalmatia and Dalmatian Zagora	<p>Stronger influence of over the sea neighbours, Far East and Balkans, accompanied by smaller influence of Middle-Eastern Cuisine in the period of Austro Hungarian Monarchy.</p> <p>Cuisine mostly based on meat (lamb in particular), fish, seafood, olive oil, vegetables, grains, etc.</p>	<p><i>Cold Appetizers:</i> Octopus salad, salted sardines, salted anchovies, raw oysters, Smoked ham, soft cheese, etc.</p> <p><i>Hot appetizers:</i> fish soup, marinades of baked fish, Noodles with shrimps, Frog risotto, Seafood risotto, Hake soup, Black risotto, etc.</p> <p><i>Main dishes:</i> grilled fish on live coals ("gradele"), Lamb or octopus with herbs under "peka", Dalmatian Pašticada, Lamb tripes with bacon, grilled Red-grouper with Dalmatian Swiss-chard and potatoes, Neretva eel and frog "Brodet", etc.</p> <p><i>Desserts:</i> Dalmatian fritule, Smokvenjak (fig cake), Brač Škanjate, fried apples with jam and almonds, Krokant, Makaruli, Rafiole, Dalmatian Rožata, etc.</p>

Source: ———, 2014

Stroligo Herceg (2008) emphasizes in her research that Croatian gastronomic offer within its coastal part has been developed on a unique tradition of Mediterranean cuisine, based on tasty and healthy groceries most frequently grown on the soil of a destination that offers these dishes. Groceries mostly used in food preparation are fish and seafood, freshly grown vegetables and fruit, garlic, virgin olive oil, wine, goat and sheep cheese, and many others. They ways of food preparation are mostly boiling, braising, grilling on “gradele” (grilling on bars over a live coal which provides a unique and specific taste of a dish), “peka” (groceries in a baking tin are placed under a metal bell which is covered in live coals), etc. Dishes differ from region to a region, as visible from the previously presented table in this paper which presents dishes of the regions of Istria and Kvarner, and Dalmatia and Dalmatian Zagora. In order to be able to achieve further development of tourist offer of Croatia, one must bear in mind among many other things the necessity of preservation of traditional dishes and offering it to tourists, considering that they make an important part of the Croatian culture due to which Croatia became recognized on world level. Organization of gastronomic manifestations also has a significant importance, not only as a promotion but also an educational tool, considering that it preserves numerous traditions from oblivion for the domestic population of a destination-host (The days of Chocolate in Opatija, Days of Istrian Asparagus, Shell Days, and many others).

As one of the leading researchers in the field of Croatian Gastronomy, Ivanović (2012) pointed out in his research that Croatia has strong potential, and can achieve further development of Croatian tourist product and its competitiveness through further development of Gastronomic tourism based on offering of authentic dishes. In order to achieve this, he strengthens the need of raising the awareness of domestic population, as well as searching the support of responsible state institutions. Richness of Croatian gastronomic offer needs to become one of the main reasons for visiting Croatia, and exploring its unique tastes.

In order to present current trends, respectively attitudes of tourists who visit Croatia towards its gastronomic offer, the authors will present the selected parts of an empirical research TOMAS Summer Attitudes and Consumption of tourists in Croatia 2017 (2018).

Table 2: Gastronomy as a motive of arrival for tourists in 2017

Enjoying food and drinks, Gastronomy	%
Croatia	29,0
Istria	32,7
Primorje-Gorski kotar	19,9
Lika-Senj	18,1
Zadar	29,1
Šibenik-Knin	23,0
Split-Dalmatia	33,3
Dubrovnik-Neretva	34,5

Source: Institute for Tourism, 2018, 101

Gastronomic tourism in developed countries often fundamentally influences on tourist's choice of a holiday destination, in particular if taken into consideration that today's contemporary tourists are willing to spend over a third of their holiday costs on food. Sometimes the desire for new experiences and desire to enjoy new tastes is a sufficient motive for undertaking a journey (UNWTO, 2012), which indicates the necessity for tourist destinations to use their advantages in terms of further development of their Gastronomic tourist offer based on tradition, as well as on more modern trends (depending on tourist's preferences) in order for it to become one of crucial factors in a decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. The data from the previous table indicate that it has been registered that in 2017 enjoying food and drinks, respectively gastronomic offer was a motive of arrival for 29% of tourists who chose Croatia as a holiday destination. On the county level, the highest level of interest was shown for the offer within the Dubrovnik-Neretva county (34,5%), followed by Split-Dalmatia (33,3%), Istrian county (32,7%), followed by Zadar (29,1%), Šibenik-Knin (23,0%), Primorje-Gorski kotar (19,9%), and finally Lika-Senj (18,1%).

Table 3: **Activities during stay in a destination in 2017**

Element	Croatia	Istria	Primorje-Gorski kotar	Lika-Senj	Zadar	Šibenik-Knin	Split-Dalmatia	Dubrovnik-Neretva
Going to restaurants	46,9	39,0	45,6	47,9	53,3	64,9	48,1	50,5
Going to cafe bars, cake shops, etc.	45,5	41,5	49,3	27,7	51,6	74,3	37,3	45,0
Visiting olive oil roads	9,1	19,2	4,7	8,0	6,3	3,1	4,8	2,0

Source: Institute for Tourism, 2018, 111

In terms of preferred activities during their stay in Croatia, the majority of tourists (46,9%) chose to visit restaurants and experience gastronomic tourist offer, followed by visiting café bars and cake shops (45,5%), while visiting olive oil roads achieved extremely poor 9,1%, which is devastating considering the tradition of olive oil production. On county level, when discussing experiencing gastronomic specialties in restaurants, the highest results were registered in the counties of Šibenik-Knin (64,9%), Zadar (53,3%), Dubrovnik-Neretva (50,5%), Split-Dalmatia (48,1%), Lika-Senj (47,9%), Primorje-Gorski kotar (45,6%), while Istria achieved the lowest 39,0%. Going to café shops and tasting desserts in cake shops was the activity of high interest for tourists in the majority of Dalmatian counties, although the county of Primorje-Gorski kotar achieved high 49,3%. Highest interest for visiting olive oil roads was registered in Istrian County (19,2%), which despite the highest result on county level, is still insufficient in relation to the possible success. Other counties achieved extremely low result.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction of tourists with gastronomic offer in 2017

Element	Croatia	Istria	Primorje-Gorski kotar	Lika-Senj
Richness of gastronomic offer in a destination	68,2 Medium	65,9 Medium	74,9 High	64,3 Medium
Food quality in the accommodation establishment	78,5 High	80,7 Very high	80,5 Very high	61,6 Medium
Food quality in restaurants outside the accommodation establishment	68,8 Medium	66,5 Medium	73,7 High	67,6 Medium
„Value for money“ of the gastronomic offer	70,7 High	77,9 High	72,5 High	55,1 Low

Element	Zadar	Šibenik-Knin	Split-Dalmatia	Dubrovnik-Neretva
Richness of gastronomic offer in a destination	65,7 Medium	67,0 Medium	68,2 Medium	68,0 Medium
Food quality in the accommodation establishment	70,5 High	82,7 Very high	76,8 Medium	79,3 Medium
Food quality in restaurants outside the accommodation establishment	71,8 High	77,1 High	63,4 Medium	68,7 Medium
„Value for money“ of the gastronomic offer	61,0 Medium	65,2 Medium	68,3 Medium	70,6 High

Source: Institute for Tourism, 2018, 114

Customer Satisfaction is, besides service quality one of the main factors in achieving competitiveness, profitability and recognisability (Marković et al. 2010, 141) of a tourist destination. Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return (Yoon & Uysal, 2005, 47 according to Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Satisfaction with the destination leads to customer loyalty and this in return gives a higher level of intention to repeat the visit. Quality gastronomy is a decisive factor in satisfaction, as it produces a lasting memory about the experience lived by the tourist. Thus depending on the expectations held by the consumer as to the gastronomy of the destination, such expectations predict their level of loyalty or fidelity, leading to repeat purchases behaviour. Here is where success lies: having tourists revisit the destination due to its gastronomy. The festive atmosphere, relaxation and fun experienced by the tourist during a gastronomic route, and the social interaction with people of similar interests create associations in the tourist's mind linked to the good times experienced by the visitor (UNWTO, 2012, 8). Previously in the paper the authors have presented theoretically that coastal Croatia indeed possesses a rich gastronomic offer based on its heritage, respectively, the tradition of preparation of numerous Mediterranean dishes that differ from county to a county, and as such, if prepared properly, can satisfy the most demanding tourists by offering them unique and unrepeatable tastes and sense of satisfaction that could stimulate them to visit again. The data in the previous table present tourist's expressed level of satisfaction with the gastronomic tourist offer in Croatia in 2017. The data in the previous table present

tourist's expressed level of satisfaction with the gastronomic tourist offer in Croatia in 2017. The results are extremely unsatisfactory in relation to its potential, respectively on Croatian level overall richness of gastronomic offer in a destination as well as the quality of food offered in restaurants outside the accommodation establishments were graded as average, while the quality of food in the accommodation establishments and overall value for money were graded as high. When monitoring the results on county level, richness of gastronomic offer in a destination was graded as high only in the county of Primorje-Gorski kotar while other counties were graded as average. Food quality in the accommodation establishment was graded as average only in Lika-Senj, Split-Dalmatia and Dubrovnik-Neretva County, while in other counties the level of satisfaction was expressed as very high or high. The expressed level of satisfaction with the gastronomic offer outside the accommodation establishments was considered high only in Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Zadar and Šibenik-Knin, while in other counties the results indicated average level of satisfaction. Achieved value for money of the gastronomic offer was graded as high in Istria, Primorje-Gorski kotar and Dubrovnik-Neretva, while Zadar and Šibenik-Knin was evaluated with an average grade. Lika-Senj county was the only county in which tourists expressed low level of satisfaction. Previous results reflected on the tourist consumption, which was to be expected. In 2017 average total daily consumption of a tourist amounted approximately 78,77 EUR per day, of which the highest daily consumption was registered in the Dubrovnik-Neretva County (113,14 EUR), followed by Split-Dalmatia (84,51 EUR), Istria (79,18 EUR), Primorje-Gorski kotar (76,94 EUR), Šibenik-Knin (75,98 EUR), Zadar (64,61 EUR), and lowest in Lika-Senj (54,03 EUR). The highest consumption on the offer of food and beverages in bars and restaurants was registered in Dubrovnik-Neretva County (20,67 EUR), followed by Primorje-Gorski kotar (15,51 EUR) and Split-Dalmatia (14,96 EUR). Other counties registered lower level of consumption, lowest consumption being registered in Lika-Senj County (Institute for Tourism, 2018, 116).

3. PROPOSITION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DIRECTIONS TOWARDS FURTHER COMPETITIVENESS OF CROATIAN GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

In the previous chapter, the authors presented theoretically all the essential characteristics of Croatian gastronomic offer in Croatian coastal destinations, and its potential for contributing towards even more competitive positioning of Croatia on the tourist market in this segment. Selected results of the research TOMAS 2017 presented in the paper which reflect the current state of Croatian Gastronomic tourism indicate that Croatia needs to undertake further developmental actions in order to increase not only the number of tourists who would during their holiday decision-making process choose Croatia primarily for exploring its gastronomic specialties, but also to increase their level of satisfaction with the gastronomic offer and gastronomy related experiences in general. In order to achieve that, it must observe and apply best practices from competing destinations. In this case the authors chose Ireland considering that its concept of Gastronomic tourism represents an ideal combination of tradition and tourism which derives from gastronomy, which connects diverse people and areas. Ireland, a country of turbulent history and similar number of inhabitants, rich tourist offer and places where diverse cultures pair well makes a valuable and significant

model for successful development of tourist offer of Croatia which contributes to its competitive positioning on the tourist market. Gastronomy represents a lively presentation of life through history by providing an excellent opportunity of promotion through lively combination of colors, shapes and flavors which can be seen from various promotion materials of Irish gastronomy, which should also be applied on the tourist gastronomic offer of the Republic of Croatia. Additional proof of Ireland recognizing the potential of Gastronomic tourism is development and application of a Food and Drink Strategy 2018 – 2023 (Fáilte Ireland National Tourism Development Authority, n.d.). Further development of Croatian Gastronomic tourism must be based on the following (adaptation according to National Tourism Development Authority Fáilte Ireland, 2011):

- stronger inclusion of traditional Croatian dishes in the overall offer of Croatian Gastronomic tourism (but particular attention needs to be given to the counties that achieved lower results);
- uniqueness and distinctiveness must be emphasized through promotion of locally grown and produced food which would reflect Croatian tourist image as natural and preserved;
- tourists needs and preferences must be understood and met, but always while preserving the offer's and destination's authenticity;
- it is necessary to preserve destination's local and regional authenticity through ensuring unique gastronomic experiences in a form of not just tasting, but also learning about destination's (gastronomic) tradition and culture;
- achieving value and experience for money (with particular emphasis on quality) must be ensured by all cost;
- Profitability must be ensured while continuously upholding sustainability principles;
- All the conducted improvements need to be promoted adequately, with particular attention paid to internet.
- Gastronomic offer as an identity of a nation and a destination-new product and marketing approach with a goal of creating a product of additional value;
- Gastronomic offer must become an integral part of strategic plans and programs on national, regional and destination level;
- Standardization of Gastronomic tourist offer, formation of brand, standards and quality measures of tourist offer.

Previously presented data in the paper point to the importance of gastronomic offer for attracting tourists to Croatia, considering that it represents an important motive for visiting, as well as formation of a tourist product of additional economic and social value for all stakeholders in a destination.

CONCLUSION

The authors have presented within this paper the importance and the main characteristics of Gastronomic tourist offer of Croatia, and its crucial role in Croatia's competitive positioning on the tourist market. The results presented in the paper indicate on uneven level of development which has resulted primarily in lower motivation of tourists for visiting Croatia due to its gastronomic offer, as well as their

level of expressed satisfaction with this form of offer which was mostly average. Creating new tourist products and marketing approaches in their formation must contain the elements of gastronomic offer as an element of additional value of total Croatian tourism. As limiting conditions, it is necessary to mention complex regulative frames and insufficient destination management awareness about the advantages which provides stronger inclusion of gastronomic elements in tourist offer. Gastronomic offer will enable strengthening of awareness of the local community, and tourists about the identity which will become the principle carrier of further investing in development of a tourist product and strengthening of economic value for all destination stakeholders. It is advisable for Croatia to use Irish examples of good practice in developing gastronomic tourism offer. Further research needs to be focused on measuring additional value which are achieved by including the elements of Gastronomic offer into the tourist product, and in determining its influence on entire destination's competitive advantage on the tourist market. Also, the authors advise that future research is focused on measuring the level of satisfaction of tourists with the gastronomic tourist offer.

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